

The mind of the 'Body'

BY MICHAEL O'KEEFFE & MARK LELINWALLA

If Jesse Ventura can make it to the Netherlands for Thanksgiving, he'll add one more job to an already impressive resume that includes gigs as a Navy SEAL, Rolling Stones bodyguard, professional wrestler, mayor, governor, author and television host. Marijuana judge.

"Can I be one of the judges in Holland for the marijuana thing?" Ventura cracked last week after meeting High Times editor Steve Hager, the founder of the Cannabis Cup, the pot fest held every year in Amsterdam.

Ventura told Hager during their meeting at the venerable Russian Tea Room on W. 57th St. that he is no longer smokes pot, but he was a midnight toker during the 1960s.

"I smoked pot," Ventura said. "I grew up in the '60s. If you grew up in the '60s and say you didn't smoke pot, you are either a liar or you didn't really grow up in the '60s."

Ventura was in town to promote his new book, "American Conspiracies," which was released by Skyhorse Publishing last week, and he came to the Russian Tea Room to speak to the Hudson Union Society, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that invites politicians, authors, scientists, actors and other notables to speak about their work and opinions. The event was only open to Hudson Union Society members and a handful of journalists, including Hager, a tall, thin man with long gray hair who eagerly agreed to Ventura's request.

The book, which is an extension of the show Ventura hosts on truTV, "Conspiracy Theory," examines the chapters in American history that don't get included in textbooks, including the alleged plots behind the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, allegations of government dope dealing during Iran-Contra, Watergate, Wall Street scams, stolen elections and the Jonestown Massacre.

Ventura believes there is ample evidence that suggests the Bush administration knew about the 9/11 attacks in advance but did nothing to prevent them – and in fact may have assisted the worst case of terrorism on American soil in history.

"We need a new investigation, an investigation with subpoena power," Ventura said. "We need people who are not in the government to do the investigation. We need a true investigation."

Ventura, an independent who was elected Minnesota governor in 1998, has little use for Democrats or Republicans. He says politicians are more interested in furthering their own ideologies and parties than serving their constituents. He had particularly strong words for the Tea Party, which he calls an Astroturf movement working on behalf of big business interests and the GOP to smear President Obama.

"The Tea Party is a bit of a fraud," Ventura said. "They say they are here to defend the Constitution, but where were they when the Bush administration was getting rid of habeas corpus? I find it ironic that they were founded after Barack Obama was elected. This is not a grassroots movement."

Ventura, tanned and wearing jeans, sneakers, a gray T-shirt and a dark blazer, looked a bit like a beach bum at the event. In fact, he has become a beach bum in the years since he left the governor's office in Minnesota. He spends winters on Mexico's Baja peninsula, where he has no phone, TV or computer. The only way to reach him, he says, is through his wife's e-mail account.

"You get a different perspective looking in as opposed to looking out. The first thing that is apparent is that we are now living in East Berlin," said Ventura referring to what he sees as an erosion people's civil liberties. "Coming back to the United States is like going back to East Berlin."

Ventura may not be up for East Berlin, but he's definitely up for Amsterdam.